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With the scholarship support of the Center on Civility & Democratic Engagement, I was able to study and intern in Washington, D.C. through the University of California in Washington, D.C. program (UCDC) in the Spring of 2016. During my participation, I was a student in two courses at the UCDC center and an intern at the Department of Justice's Environment and Natural Resources Department. However, engagement with civil and democratic life in the nation's capital extended beyond the walls of my cubicle and classroom. I found that Washington, D.C. is a place full of passions and goals that sometimes overlap and at other times collide. I was able to see this in everything from my class textbook for "Environmental Policy and Politics" course to legal resistance to environmental regulations to the anger on the tens of thousands of participants in the annual "March for Life". Engagement is paramount for democracy and D.C. is a perfect place for seeing the many ways in which democratic participation is tangible and reachable for all people of this nation.



In my internship with the Department of Justice, I assisted attorneys in litigating violations of federal environmental laws, such as the Clean Water Act, the Oil Pollution Act, the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, and Clean Air Act. I was placed in the Environment and Natural Resources' largest section called the Environmental Enforcement Section, where attorneys receive requests from government agencies for help with suing or settling with a person or company for non-compliance with an environmental statute or regulation. I specifically worked on conducting legal research, media searches, and document reviews for multiple attorneys of the section's group called Region 1 and 2, consisting of cases addressing



environmental issues of North Eastern states, Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. I also assisted with Environmental justice section and division wide meetings, where attorneys discussed tools for improving United States attorneys responses to EJ concerns and the department's latest EJ cases.

Interning at the Department of Justice, with multiple supportive and encouraging mentors and supervisors, opened doors for accessing DOJ speaker events and converted visits to the superior and circuit courts as essential experiences for enhancing the quality of my internship, growth, and learning. Some of the events I had the opportunity to attend include the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day commemoration with Attorney General Loretta Lynch and other DOJ leaders, the African-American history month commemoration with the NAACP and AG Lynch, the World Wildlife Day forum with Environment and Natural Resources Division Assistant Attorney General John Cruden, and a presentation with plaintiff for same-sex marriage case *Obergefell v. Hodges*. Furthermore, I attended an argument hearing by the Department of Justice and Environmental Protection Agency at the Circuit Court on an environmental regulation, in addition to a civil case at the Superior Court for a defendant with eight charges. The United States through its leaders of the Department of Justice and meticulous legal processes is receptive of civil engagement and encouraging of public comment. These events and cases gave me hope for both the accessibility of the government and the commitment to justice behind the many qualified and expert leaders in the DOJ.



The courses that I took at UCDC also informed me and furthered my engagement in the civil life of DC and American politics. For a course on "Contemporary Media and Politics", I had the opportunity to hear from a BuzzFeed news reporter on foreign affairs and a communications manager for Senator Dianne Feinstein, as well visit the Newseum, a museum on news, and the Press Club, where I got to hear from the Selective Service on contemporary issues of military enlistment. For a four-week module, I had the opportunity to hear from multiple non-profit organization executive directors. UCDC also provided weekly forums with guest speakers, including former presidential candidate Ralph Nadar, immigration advisor to President Obama Cecilia Munoz, and Code Pink executive director Ali McCracken, from which I gained value insight on election politics, advocacy on the hill, and policy development.



Beyond the amazing lessons I took away from the assignments I worked on and the court cases and speaker events I attended, nothing shaped and marked my experience in DC like my active participation in democratic processes of demonstration and advocacy.

On April 18, I walked up to the Supreme Court to observe the rally advocating for “unfreezing” or taking the hold off of the immigration reform policies DACA and DAPA. Before the signers, performers, story tellers, and politicians, I quickly became a participant of the passionate and expressive crowd. I also experienced direct engagement with politics when I assisted my Ronald E. McNair scholarship director from UC Berkeley with educating congress people and their legislative staff on budget cuts to the federally funded scholarship programs called TRIO. I also observed an anti-Trump rally on my way from work to the metro, attended a breakfast with California senator Dianne Feinstein, and walked alongside the “March for Life” annual pro-life rally. These experiences showed to me the ways in which people living in United States have access to the government and mediums for voicing their opinions, regardless of the impact or the reception.



My experience in DC over the course of one semester was transformational personally, professionally, and politically. I realize that despite the distance from Washington, D.C., California and the UC Berkeley campus are not so different in its commitment to certain values of civic engagement and social change. However, without bringing awareness to matters of concern regarding about our society, environment, government, and economy, we would not be motivated to meet with politicians, demonstrate our opinions publicly, and hold people accountable according to the law. I am grateful for the support and funding of the Center on Civility & Democratic Engagement and hope that students in the future continue to have significant experiences in D.C. through the UCDC program. With the skills that I have developed from this experience and knowledge that I have gained inside and outside of the classroom, I hope to continue to raise awareness in the field of environmental advocacy and take advantage of political platforms for making social change and achieving goals.

